



COMMISSIONERS MEETING

Wednesday, November 19, 2025

Minutes

This meeting will be conducted in person and via Zoom at
County Hall
12 Court Street
Keene NH, 03431

Zoom Call-in Number: +1 646 558 8656

Meeting ID: 409 748 8803

Pin #: 603123

Start Time 8:30 AM

Present: Commissioners Terry Clark, Claudia Stewart, and Skipper DiBernardo

Absent:

Staff: County Administrator Coates, Finance Director Trombly, HR Director May, Director of Executive Services/Communications Bernstein, Grants Manager Bansley, Maplewood Facilities Director Newman, CCEMS Chief Kreamer, County Attorney McLaughlin, Maplewood Administrator Kindopp, and Superintendent Phillips

Guests:

Public Comments

Upon recognition from the Chair, a Public Comment on topics of interest may be made.

I. Elected Officials & Department Head Updates

To receive, as informational, departmental updates requiring Commissioner review, participation, approval, and impactful departmental and operational issues.

1. HR Director May requested a non-FMLA leave of absence for a Maplewood employee who was hired in August. She is having a baby in January and is requesting 12 weeks of leave.

Commissioner DiBernardo made a motion to approve the non-FMLA leave of absence for 12 weeks. Commissioner Stewart seconded. Upon a roll call vote the motion passed unanimously.

2. A Maplewood employee is soon to exhaust her FMLA leave after getting surgery. She is looking for up to eight weeks of non-FMLA leave of absence as she cannot return to work during her recovery.

Commissioner DiBernardo made a motion to approve the non-FMLA leave of absence for eight weeks. Commissioner Stewart seconded. Upon a roll call vote the motion passed unanimously.

3. County Attorney McLaughlin was awarded the County Attorney of the Year Award at the NH Association of Counties this year. Unfortunately, he could not attend the ceremony. County Administrator Coates congratulated him for this honor and read the nomination that was written by staff for the award.

Chris McLaughlin has served with distinction as the Cheshire County Attorney since 2013. In this role, he leads a team of deputy and assistant county attorneys responsible for prosecuting all felony-level crimes in Cheshire County. Drawing on a legal career spanning over three decades, including 12 years as a public defender and many years as a prosecutor, Attorney McLaughlin brings a breadth of experience and seasoned judgment to the office. Under his leadership, the Office of the County Attorney handles hundreds of serious cases annually (329 felony cases in 2021 alone) while providing guidance to local law enforcement on investigations and charging decisions. Colleagues and community members alike recognize his steady leadership he was initially appointed unanimously to fill a vacancy and has been re-elected without opposition ever since, a testament to the trust and confidence he has earned.

Attorney McLaughlin was instrumental in establishing Cheshire County's Drug/Treatment Court in 2013, helping secure a federal grant for its launch. He was part of the planning grant and a core team member before the program's inception, acting as the program's legal gatekeeper and ensuring eligible non-violent offenders receive treatment-focused rehabilitation. His strong advocacy for alternatives to incarceration including drug treatment, mental health court, and diversion programs has enhanced public safety by reducing recidivism and offering offenders a path to reform.

Attorney McLaughlin has overseen innovations that improved prosecutorial efficiency and inter-agency collaboration. He supervises the Regional Prosecutor Program, which prosecutes misdemeanors for 12 towns and the City of Keene, bringing uniform standards and training to local prosecutions. This initiative, under his direction, has increased efficiency, improved officer training, and ensured consistent justice countywide. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he leveraged technology to keep cases moving, minimizing backlogs in the court system and demonstrating adaptability in crisis.

Throughout his tenure, McLaughlin has been a champion of fair and ethical prosecution. He is widely respected as a fair-minded prosecutor who seeks justice rather than simply convictions. He was instrumental in fostering the establishment and eventual evolution of the county Restorative Justice/Community program. He has cultivated strong partnerships with law enforcement, the courts, and community organizations (such as the Child Advocacy Center and Domestic Violence Task Forces) to ensure victims' voices are heard and offenders are held accountable.

4. CCEMS Chief Kreamer said there was a fire on Elliot Street in Keene, CCEMS responded to the incident with five ambulances.

Kreamer said it was a strong collaboration between CCEMS and Keene Fire. He said CCEMS brought five people to the hospital.

II. Scheduled Items

Master Agenda Item #1307: Public Hearing, Community Development Block Grant Applications – S. Bansley

Action Expected: To hold a public hearing on the CDBG feasibility study application and authorize the Chair and County Administrator to sign and submit the application.

The Chair opened the first public hearing for discussion of the Community Development Block Grant Applications at 9:01am and read the public hearing notice.

Suzanne Bansley, Grant Administrator, explained that CDBG funds are available to municipalities for economic development, public facilities and housing rehabilitation projects that primarily benefit low- and moderate-income persons. Cheshire County is eligible to receive up to \$500,000 in the housing and public facilities category, up to \$500,000 in the economic development category, up to \$750,000 in the microenterprise category, and \$25,000 for feasibility studies. Suzanne Bansley provided a handout describing the NH Community Development Block Grant Program eligible activities that included the area HUD income limits.

Suzanne Bansley provided a project handout. The proposed CDBG application is for up to \$25,000 to support Cheshire County's Westmoreland Complex. The funding will be used to support water treatment planning activities. If the proposed application is successful, the funds will be awarded to Cheshire County and used by the County, not sub-granted.

Project description provided during the hearing: Cheshire County's 30-year-old surface water treatment plant at the Westmoreland Complex (Maplewood Nursing Home) is nearing end-of-life with critical components failing. The departure of the facility's long-time licensed operator, combined with regulatory requirements for full-time staffing and backup water supply, has created an urgent operational crisis with unsustainable costs. Water is temporarily being provided by a single aging well, which long term operations would violate state redundancy requirements and threatens service to 131 elderly, low-to-moderate income residents dependent on Medicaid. The plant was engineered to produce 80,000 gallons daily for a former correctional facility; current demand is only 14,000 gallons daily, creating fundamental system mismatch and disproportionate operational burden. This planning project addresses the need by procuring a qualified engineering firm to conduct a comprehensive water system evaluation. The study will assess plant condition, capacity, and performance; analyze demand; evaluate water sources; review treatment, storage, and distribution systems; conduct regulatory compliance audits; and provide comparative cost-benefit analyses between treatment plant upgrades and well-based alternatives. The project primarily benefits 99 residents of Maplewood Nursing Home on Medicaid (76% LMI ratio of 131 total residents). Long-term benefits include financial sustainability through potential annual savings of six figures or more, operational resilience eliminating chronic infrastructure vulnerability, and preservation of affordable long-term care access for low-income elderly populations with no private alternatives. Infrastructure planning ensures the facility remains viable and accessible to vulnerable populations for generations.

A representative from the Westmoreland Complex, Aaron Newman, Facilities Director Westmoreland Campus provided the following details about the proposed project: The timeline we aim for is to open the bid process in April, hire a firm by May, commissioners can expect to review the plan and have another hearing over it in September, and then consider and decide on options by end of 2026. The cost estimate for plan is \$26,000, and grant will cover \$25,000, and the operational budget for 2026 already has \$1,000 in it for the match. The reason we need to outsource the engineering study is due to the numerous regulations, laws, environmental concerns, cost analysis, and that no person on staff has this very particular high-level expertise and credentials to do a study like this properly.

Grant Administrator Bansley noted that we will be self-managing this grant and not outsourcing the management to SWRPC, as with other CDBG grants.

The Chair opened the floor to public comment on the projects: no members of the public were present. Commissioners and staff had no questions or comments.

Vice Chair Claudia Stewart motioned to close the Public Hearing on the Projects portion of the CDBG Block Grant Application Hearing. Seconded by Clerk Skipper DiBernardo. All in favor. Motion passed.

Vice Chair Claudia Stewart motioned to approve the submittal of the applications, vote to authorize County Administrator Christopher Coates or County Commissioner Chair Terry Clark as the Authorized Designees to sign and submit the CDBG applications, and upon approval of the CDBG applications, authorize the Authorized Designee to execute any documents which may be necessary to effectuate the CDBG contract Seconded by Clerk Skipper DiBernardo. All in favor. Motion passed.

Master Agenda Item #1308: Public Hearing, Housing and Community Development Plan – S. Bansley

Action Expected: To hold a public hearing and re-adopt the County’s Housing and Community Development Plan.

The Chair motioned to open the second public hearing for discussion of the proposed Housing and Community Development Plan. Seconded by Vice Chair Claudia Stewart. All in favor. Motion passed.

Suzanne Bansley, explained that the Housing and Community Development Plan is one that Cheshire County adopted last in 2024, and it is required to be reviewed and re-adopted every three years to qualify for CDBG funds. No changes have been made at this time, and the document is being re-adopted.

This project conforms with Cheshire County’s Housing and Community Development Plan Goal to “Support existing public and nonprofit agencies that provide services to lower income people and families, including nutrition, day care, substance abuse, emergency and transitional housing, physical health, mental health, family counseling, education, family planning, vocational training, legal services, and recreation”.

Vice Chair Claudia Stewart motioned to close the second public hearing for discussion of the proposed Housing and Community Development Plan. Seconded by Clerk Skipper DiBernardo. All in favor. Motion passed.

Master Agenda Item #1309: Public Hearing, Residential Anti-Displacement and Relocation Assistance Plan – S. Bansley

Action Expected: To hold a public hearing and adopt the County’s Residential Anti-Displacement and Relocation Assistance Plan.

The Chair motioned to open the third public hearing regarding the Residential Anti-

displacement and Relocation Assistance Plan. Seconded by Vice Chair Claudia Stewart. All in favor. Motion passed.

Suzanne Bansley explained that if any permanent displacement takes place as a result of this project, the Uniform Relocation Act must be followed, which requires that any permanently displaced household or business in a project using federal funds must be found comparable housing in a comparable neighborhood at a comparable price. Suzanne Bansley noted that no permanent displacement is planned or anticipated at this time. Under the certification section of the application, the County will certify that the Residential Anti-displacement and Relocation Assistance (RARA) Plan is in place, and in the event that it is discovered that this specific project does permanently displace persons or households, a displacement implementation plan must be submitted to CDFA prior to obligating or expending funds.

Chair called for public comment. There were no public present, and no comments or questions from commissioners or staff.

Vice Chair Claudia Stewart motioned to close the third public hearing for discussion of the Residential Anti-displacement and Relocation Assistance Plan. Seconded by Clerk Skipper DiBernardo. All in favor. Motion passed.

Vice Chair Claudia Stewart motioned to adopt the Residential Anti-displacement and Relocation Assistance Plan. Seconded by Clerk Skipper DiBernardo. All in favor. Motion passed.

The hearings ended at 9:13a.m.

Master Agenda Item #1310: Receipt of Hemenway Funds – S. Trombly

Action Expected: To discuss the reception of Hemenway funds and have the County Commission Chair sign the receipt.

1. Finance Director Trombly said this year the County received \$31,806.83 from the Hemenway fund.

Commissioner Clark signed the receipt.

County Administrator

Weekly Operations Report - The County Administrator will update the Commissioners on activities that have taken place since the previous meeting.

1. County Administrator Coates said the County was well represented at the NH Association of Counties annual conference. He said the County won the most awards and had the most amount of people in attendance.

III. Old Business

IV. New Business

1. Finance Director Trombly said the County holiday party is on December 6. She shared the sign-up information with the Commissioners.

2. Assistant Finance Director Hall said the Maplewood Angel Tree project is going smoothly. Out of 134 residents only 12 have been unfulfilled so far. She shared additional information with the Commissioners.

V. Consent Agenda Items:

Vote to accept the Weekly Manifests and Minutes of November 5, 2025

Commissioner Stewart made a motion to approve the manifests and minutes of November 5, 2025. Upon a roll call vote the motion passed unanimously.

VI. Calendar

Action Expected: To accept the calendar as informational and to make necessary changes/additions.

VII. General Discussion for Commissioners

VIII. Nonpublic Sessions:

IX. Adjournment

At 10:16AM Commissioner Clark made a motion to adjourn, and Commissioner DiBernardo seconded. Upon a roll call vote the motion passed unanimously.

Minutes Recorded by:
Davis Bernstein
Director of Executive Services & Communications

Minutes Reviewed by:
Commissioner DiBernardo
Clerk, Cheshire County Commissioners